

ESTONIA

TRADE UNIONS' VOICE WAS HEARD

TALLIN A conference of the Association of the Industrial Trade Unions of Estonia was held on March 17. The Association unites trade union of the power, electrotechnical, light, machine building, and printing industries. It adopted a resolution expressing great concern in connection with the developing chaos in the economy which is placing 50% of Estonia's population under the poverty level. As such, the liberalization of prices without compensating increases in pay is a reform being carried out at the expense of the workers. The trade unions demanded a limit on prices for foodstuffs, and a renewal of state subsidies to certain branches of industry. In addition the citizenship laws were subject to severe criticism. On that same day the government declared the introduction of subsidies on transport, apartments, and communal services.

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THE WORKERS' AND TRADE UNIONS' INFORMATION CENTRE
KAS-KOR

MOSCOW

RUSSIA

 A MONTHLY
INFORMATION DIGEST

N3, MARCH 1992

RUSSIA

PICKETS ORGANIZED, A STRIKE POSTPONED

PERM. On March 7, activists of the social-political alliance "Rabochij" ("The worker") organized pickets at the entrance of the Sverdlov plant to support the pre-strike demands of the plant's collective for bigger pay. Three polishing shops were to strike on March 9, but the strike was postponed since the administration promised pay rises.

THE LEFT MARCH

MOSCOW. On March 7, at the Sovetskaya square a meeting was held. It was organized by the Federation of Revolutionary Anarchists, the Confederation of Anarcho-Sindicalists, the Socialist Workers' Union and other leftisi groups. They advanced slogans: "Down with the government of speculators and beaurocrats!", "Enterprises - to the working people!". More than 150 people took part in it.

TEACHERS THREATEN TO STRIKE

MOSCOW. The teachers'strike committee of the capital's North-West district prepared a packedge of demands to the city's authorities and the Education Department. In connection with the steep price rises due to liberalization the teachers demand pay rises, and bonuses for checking pupils'homework, for grade direction and for other additional work. If the demands are not satisfied the teacher will hold a hour warning

strike on April 16, and begin a full strike on May 4. The teachers of other Moscow districts will evidently support the strike.

THE STRIKE THAT DID NOT TAKE PLACE

MOSCOW-KEMEROVO. A three-side commission was in session on March 6, at the Supreme Soviet of the Russian Federation. It had to solve problems in connection with the complicated situation in Kusbass coal mining region. G. Burbulis, the first Vice-Premier, stated that he had cancelled his previous decision to send a governmental commission to the Kusbass mining region after consultations with the Council of Workers Committees of the Kusbass and the regional administration. Michail Kisluk, the chief of the regional administration asserted that the majority of workers' demands were unreal, the food supply was at the level of 70-s and he saw no reasons for strikes.

The Federation of the Trade Union organizations of Kusbass (formerly an official one) expressed their determination to begin a strike on March 11.

The Russian Coal Industry Workers Union expressed their support for the strike but the coal miners are not going to stop working, since the General Tariff Agreement with this Trade Union had already been concluded and many of the problems solved. The regional Kusbass Workers' Committee stated on the same day that the Federation's demand to rise wages of all the working people in the region 6-fold was put forward in disregard of the agreement reached between the workers' committees and the Russian President. The workers' committee called the official Trade Union the last stronghold of the communists forces and blamed their leaders for the support of restorationist forces that seek to overthrow the government and limit the power of the President. The Council of the Workers' Committees called on the workers of the region to refrain from the strike.

BELOVO. Teachers of this railway centre and collectives of two auto-transport firms expressed their readiness to strike by March 10th. These workers did not receive their salaries in time because of the lack of cash. The Belovo Trade Union of Coal Industry Workers did not support the strike.

BERESOVSKY. Medical workers of the town are going to begin a strike called by the town federation of Trade Unions. Two conferences of the town's medical workers were held. It was decided which the medical structures would go on strike and which would refrain from the strike to carry out the urgent medical services. The town strike council was formed. Teachers supported the medics. In six town schools the strike began. The teachers demand pay rises and the lowering the prices in the town and the region. The local geological survey organization is ready to support the strike. The strikers are partially supported by the local construction plant Trade Union. The miners are not supporting the strike.

MEZHDURECHENSK. A strike committee of the workers of local trade is formed and their demands elaborated. The coal miners are not going to strike but are not happy with the delay of their pay.

OSINNIKI. The local tradesmen's strike committee stated its readiness to support the strike on March 11.

LENINSK-KUSNETSKY. The city strike committee's attempt to hold a three-hours warning strike on March 11, failed. The strike committees of medics, teachers, the chemical workers, the "Kusbass Element", and some trade shops spoke in favour of the strike on March 11. Members of the Independent Miners' Trade Union were against the strike and said if it was organized they would agitate the population against it. If the teachers went on strike, they added, the coalminers themselves would sell bread, milk and other necessary items as retail sellers. Less than 20% of the city shops are supporting the idea of the strike.

KEMEROVO. Directors of canteens and restaurants spoke at their meeting in favour of a strike demanding the pay rises for their personnel. Upon discussing this information the Council of Working Collectives decided to appeal to the three-sided commission and suggest the following: to register anew all the acting Trade Unions, to proclaim the Trade Union property to be state property, and to ask all the Trade Unions having claim to this property to appeal to the administration within the time stated by the law.

KEMEROVO. On March 10, the Coordinating Council of Inter-trade Strike Committee postponed the strike that had been called for on March 11. This decision was made after receiving a cable from the first Vice-Premier G. Burbulis in which he informed that a governmental commission was going to the region.

The commission arrived on March 11. It planned to meet with the regional administration, the city and regional deputies, the Federation of Trade Union organizations, the Council of Workers' Committees and the Independent Miners' Union.

NOVOKUZNETSK-KEMEROVO. A governmental commission arrived in the region on March 13. During negotiations with the representatives of the Council of Workers' Committees of Kusbass and the Federation of Trade Unions of the region a protocol of the tripartite commission of the Russian Federation on social and labour relations was adopted. The commission agreed that Trade Union demands to the Russian Government reflect the real situation in the Kusbass region and admitted that these demands are supported by the local administration as well as the workplace collectives. At the same time, the commission stated that the call for an all-regional limitless strike was supported only by the Kusbass Federation of Trade Unions. But the leadership of the Council, the Administration Chief, representatives of other Trade Unions as well as collectives of coal and metallurgical industries, while supporting the demands, stood against the strike.

The most acute problem which must be urgently solved, as all the Kusbass organizations agreed, is to eliminate the differences of wages on coal-mining industry as compared to social and cultural spheres.

One of the most important questions put forward by the coal-miners to the Government is the planning liberalization of prices on the sources of energy. The coal-miners are afraid that this will lead to less demand for coal and that consequently a number of coal mines might be closed. The government representatives assured

everybody that the freeing of prices for coal would be a comparatively long process and not a single act, and the prices would be freed over the course of two years. If the necessity of closing coal mines arises it will be done only with the consent of the Trade Unions.

KEMEROVO. A session of the Council of the Kusbass Workers' Committees took place on March 19. Problems connected with the liberalization of coal prices were discussed. The Council adopted a resolution on their attitude to the official Trade Unions. It says: "Official Trade Unions and their Federation put forward populist demands which are unbearable for the country's budget. Thus they undermine economic reforms and, in effect, deprive the people of any hope for a better life. The official Trade Unions are incapable of being reformed because their structures were created on an administrative and ministerial basis. They are deceiving people."

The Council called for the creation of independent Trade Unions and leaving the official ones.

PICKETS AT THE COMMITTEE

MOSCOW. The Central Committee of Independent Trade Unions sent a protest at the end of February to the Human Rights Committee of the Russian Parliament and to the Minister of Science and Higher Education against the unlawful dismissal of the employees of the "Orbita" engineering firm in Novocherkassk, both members of the Independent Trade Union. The Committee did not receive any answer, so on March 10, the Independent Trade Union picketed the building of the Science Committee demanding punishment of the guilty and normal conditions for the functioning of the organization of the Independent Trade Union at the firm. In an hour's time the Vice-Minister Bortnik promised to study the situation and the picketing ended.

THE RUSSIAN UNION OF WORKPLACE COLLECTIVES CREATED

MOSCOW. The Constituent Congress of Russian Union of Workplace Collectives was held on March 10-11. The Statutes of the new organization were adopted and governing bodies elected. Vera Lash became the chairman. According to its leadership, the movement of workplace collectives unites now several dozen million working people. The Russian Union of Workplace Collectives entered the Interstate Union of Workplace Collectives and may well become its base.

THE GOVERNMENTAL MEMORANDUM CRITICIZED

MOSCOW. A session of the Presidium of the Moscow Federation of Trade Unions was held on March 12. Chairmen of the Branch Trade Unions took part in it. The main topic for discussion was the Russian Government memorandum on economic policy, published in the mass media. The memorandum was severely criticized. The session adopted an appeal to the working people of Moscow. The Federation is certain that by price liberalization "the government wants to dismantle the existing economic system and create a new one based on export of raw materials and energy". The Government, the Federation insisted, does not take into consideration the fact that

quite a number of enterprises in basic branches of industry will be closed after a new liberalization of prices and a huge number of highly skilled workers and engineers will be dismissed. Besides, the government intention to freeze the wages at the state enterprises while prices are constantly rising will lead to a catastrophic drop in the living standards of working people.

The presidium called upon the Moscow workplace collectives to give their opinion of the Governmental memorandum and sent a letter to B. Yeltsin, the Russian President and R. Hasbulatov, the speaker of the Parliament, asking them to state in the press their views on the Memorandum.

A STRIKE IN THE CURRICULUM

ST. PETERSBURG. A session of the city teachers' strike committee took place on March 13. It discussed the result of the strike of school teachers on March 9 and further actions. According to the strike committee about 100 school teachers collectives took part in the strike (27 collectives on an official count) in 13 city districts. 14 schools went on strike at the Vyborgsky district. Workers at a number of kindergartens also took part in it. Many collectives were not quite ready for the strike. In the connection with this, the beginning of the limitless strike was put off for April 7.

Trying to head off the initiative of the strike committee, the official Trade Union stated that it has been negotiating teachers pay raises with the administration, and that if these negotiations come to a deadlock, they would begin a strike on April 2.

"THE WORKER" WILL SUPPORT

PERM. A meeting of the social and political association "The Worker" took place on March 18. It decided to support the workers at the autotransport enterprises of the city, who plan to begin an all-city strike on March 25. The drivers and workers demand pay rises, longer leaves, and modernizing their enterprises.

TRADE UNIONS SPECIAL BATTALION

KEMEROVO. An Independent Trade Union of the Special Battalion of the Patrol Service was organized on March 7, and on March 19 it joined the Council of the Workers' Committees. 59 servicemen out of 80 formed the Trade Union.

TAKE-OFF UNDER QUESTION

MOSCOW. Sessions of the Council of Air-crew Trade Unions took place on March 19-20. It confirmed the decision to begin a strike on March 25. Air-crews are striving to conclude the tariff agreement for 1992, to give their working collectives the priority right to privatize their enterprises, to fix the conditions for the work and rest, and to change the system of social security, taking into consideration the realities of market economy. The Government had promised to solve all these problems last year but did nothing besides issue declarations.

WHO NEEDS SUCH REFORMS

RYBINSK. The Workers' Union of the city decided to enter the Movement for Democratic Reforms as a collective member keeping its structure. Leonid Gubanov, the Unions organizer who is not active now due to illness, spoke against this step. He considers the methods and means of the reforms to be antisocial.

ADMINISTRATIVE LAW BY CABLE

MOSCOW. N. Makhlatkina, the chairman of the Russian Federation Social Security Fund, and Alyalina, the Vice-chairman of the Russian Central Bank, sent a cable to all the Russian banks on March 19. In connection with the opening of the new accounts of the Russian Social Security Fund, they want to close the Social Security account of the Trade Union and to direct the money to the new account. That means that all the sums for working people's social security will be controlled by the Russian Federation of Independent Trade Unions as to a monopoly.

In connection with that the Kusbas Workers' Committees' Council sent a cable to G. Burbulis, the State Secretary, and Shokhin, a vice-Premier, expressing their bewilderment at the Government actions. The same cable to the Government was sent by Yorkuta and Inta Independent Miners' Trade Unions.

Miners of the Pechyora coal basin demanded that A. Sergeev, the Chairman of the Independent Miners' Trade Unions, should not sign the General Agreement with the Government until it cancel its decision on the fund.

ADMINISTRATION TRICK

ST. PETERSBURG. The conference of the construction personnel of the city subway was held on March 19, to conclude a new collective agreement. The administration demanded its adoption as well as a new set of regulations without discussion, allegedly to facilitate the delivery of money from the bank to pay back wages. The majority adopted the document. 50 workers left the conference protesting the administration arbitrariness.

REPEATING LESSONS

NOVOSIBIRSK. The city teachers strike committee called the teachers conference on March 20, which adopted a decision to begin a strike on April 6, demanding pay raises. One of the primary purposes of the strike committee is to create an Independent Teachers Trade Union. 70% of the city's schools sent representatives to the conference.

A TRIPARTITE COMMISSION

MOSCOW. A tripartite commission signed the general basic agreement on March 25. It provides for mutual efforts by the Government and Trade Union in the field of social insurance, employment, and periodical revision of wages according to rises in the cost of living. It was signed by the Independent Miners' Union, Air Crew and Air Controllers Union, the Socialist Trade Union as well as the three branch Trade Unions entering the Russian Federation of Independent Trade Unions. Other Trade Unions joining the Federation refused to sign the agreement.

THE UKRAINE

THE STRIKE GOES ON

KRIVOY ROG. The strike at the ore mines in the region goes on. The Ukrainian Independent Miners' Trade Union called on the strikers to join the Independent Trade Union and organize its branches at ore mines. These branches are organized at 5 mines of the region.

A NEW TRADE UNION

KIEV. The Second Congress of the All-Ukrainian Union of Working People's Solidarity was held on March 13-15. 149 delegates from 21 regions of the republic took part in it. The main item on the agenda was a program of actions in the conditions of transfer to market economy and privatization. It was decided to transform the social and political union into a Trade Union. The Congress adopted a Declaration which stated the basic principles of Trade Union activities: voluntary membership on the basis of personal choice instead of an obligatory and administrative one; only hired labour is allowed in the Trade Union and not employers or their representatives; the priority of right and power of trade union locals as compared to higher Trade Union bodies; a transfer to the system of personal individual social insurance.

The Congress adopted resolutions on social insurance, the social and economic situation in the Republic, and on a number of other questions. The Congress expressed its negative attitude toward the formation of the Commonwealth of Independent States and to formerly official Trade Union structures.

A LEAVE FOR THE GOVERNMENT PROPOSED

DONETSK. The governmental plans to shorten leaves for the miners have become known. In connection with this the Donetsk city strike committee spread leaflets on March 18, saying that the shortening of leaves at the time when a number of mines are closing cannot solve the problems of the coal mining industry. Instead of shortening our leaves, the miners stated, Vitold Fokin's Government should go on limitless leave.

DRIVERS STRIKE

DONETSK. A conference of 132 autotransport enterprises of the region took place on March 15, which decided to begin a strike on March 17. Members of the Coordinating Committee of the autotransport enterprises of the region reported on their attempts to get Ukrainian Parliament reply to their previous demands. Representatives for President, Parliament, and the Council of Ministers refused to meet representatives of these enterprises. In reply the transport workers decided to begin a strike until their demands are satisfied and they see the Government readiness to solve transport problems.

These problems are quite a few. Average wages on the region is only 1280 roubles and still many workers did not get their wages for January. 50% of the vehicles in

the region are obsolete and should be written off. 70% of oil and spare parts deliveries are "decentralized" which means that the transport enterprises get only 30% from the state and for the rest must hunt up themselves. Due to the lack of oilspare parts and, wear and tear that is impossible to compensate for under the shade tree, more than 3,000 vehicles stand idel on any given day.

THE DONETSK REGION. On March 17, the passenger cargo autotransport was stopped in Donetsk, Gorlovka, Enakievo and other cities and towns of the region. All the routes were cancelled exopt limited delivery to the foodshops. Only hospitals and kindergartens were fully serviced.

According to the data of the Coordinating Counsil, that day 42 autotransport enterprises began a strike in Donatsk, 25 in Gorgovka, 2 in Dokuchaevka (one belonging to the Construction Ministry, another one - to the Ministry of Autotransport), all the autoenterprises in Pervomaysk.

Drivers for the coal-mining assosiation "Krasnoarmeysk" amd "Makeevka" did not join the strike since their problems were mostly solved. For example, the average wage of the "Makeevka" coal mines lorry drivers is 6,000 roubles.

DOBROPOLYE. The concrete tube plant stands still due to the drivers strike as well as the city transport. The losses of these enterprises are counted in the millions of roubles. Three ore-processing plants and 4 uot of 7 mines also stand still. Two of the mines stopped completely, their names are meaningful: "Ukraine" and "Russia".

ENAKIEVO. Striking drivers organized a meeting here on March 17. Coal miners of the local coal-mining assosiation also took part in it. They supported the demands of the drivers and expressed solidarity with them in the cable addressed to the President, Parliament and the Prime Minister of the Ukraine.

DONETSK. The Independent Miners' Trade Union of the Ukraine adopted a resolution suporting the striking drivers on March 17. "The Union," the resolution says, "supports the desire of the workers to attain humane living conditions themselves, but not to wait for generosity of the bankrupt government which does not want to solve ever-accumulating problems by negotiations".

GORLOVKA. An all-city meeting of the striking drivers was held on March 17. It adopted a resolution stressing that if the Government does not go into negotiations, the strike will take all-embracing character. The resolution stated the main demands of the strikers: to raise the drivers' wages 8-10 fold, the possibility to go on pension at 55 years old for men and 50 for women, the lowering of harsh Draconian taxes for transport enterprises from 86% to 21%; to enlarge the list of professional disabilities for drivers. One of the strikers' chief demands is to conclude inter-republican agreement within the framework of the Commonwealth to ensure the normal functioning of the Ukranian transport enterprises because 80% of enterprises delivery oil, spare parts and other goods are outside the Ukranian Republic.

DONETSK. A session of the city Soviet of Peoples, Deputies opened on March 18. It considered its relation to the regional drivers' strike and adopted an address to the

Supreme Soviet and the President of the Ukraine. The address states that the strike is the result of many months of stalling by the government, that the problems of cargo and passenger transport along with the whole social and economic crisis are the result of inconsistent, contradictory and ineffective work on the part of the Ukranian Government. This policy leads to impoverishment of the people, crisis of production, paralysis of enterprises. Deputies suggested that the Government immedeatly form a reconciliatory cimmission to discuss the drivers' demands, to adopt the decision to pass transport over to the local administrations.

THE DONETSK REGION. According to data of the Coordinating Coincil as of March 18, 112 autotransport enterprises of 19 cities are taking part in the strike.

DONETSK. Representatives of the Donetsk region drivers who had been negotiating in the tripartite commission were recalled from Kiev on March 18. The recall was due to the Government refusal to negotiate with the strikers until they returned to work.

Right after that the Government said it was ready to discuss things with the strikers.

LUGANSK. The city drivers joined the Donetsk region drivers strike on March 19. That day the lines of more than 20 transport enterprises did not begin their work and a Coordinating Council of the Lugansk region drivers was formed. A united regional coordinating committee and Coordinating Council for the whole Dondas coal-mining region is being formed.

KIEV. Negotiations of the striking drivers' representatives with the Ukranian Government took place on March 19. As a result an agreement was signed which incorporated the basis demands of drivers. The Protocol was signed by representatives of the strike committee, the Parliament and the Government. But it is difficult to guarantee its fulfilment since there was not a single member of the Government high enough to make a responsible decision. On behalf of the Parliament V. Durdinets, its vice-chairman, took part.

On the whole the results of the negotiations are not satisfying for the drivers. Some members of the strike committee think the strike should go on and be organized while others consider it better to stop the strike until April 7, and see how the agreements will be

implemented. All agre that it is essential to as quickly as possible create a union of drivers that is independent of the ministry and administration.

UEMPLOYMENT AT HAND

KIEV. The first meeting of the rublic committee on employment consisting of representatives of the government, employers and unions examined the statistics of job loss. At present in the Ukraine 19,000 are officially registerely as unemployed. These are primarily former workers of the research institutes. Unemployment among workers has yet to be examined. Specialists predict that by the end of the year this figure will remain a half a million workers.

NOTR A PENNY TO THE CENTER!

KIEV On the 24th of March Mr. Kovalevsky the Chairman of the Federation of Independent Unions of the Ukraine resigned. One can speak of a split in the federation in as much as many regional and branch unions entering into the federation come out against the central leadership and are not paying union dues.

BELORUS

SOLIGORSK March 12th at 100 the mines of the Belaryskali Association stopped work. The Independent Union of Coal Miners of Belarus did not wait on the commission of the government which according to the demands of the miners conclude a General Trade and Tariff Agreement. (see Digest No 2) On March 13 pits number one, two, three, and four stopped. Pits one and four strike without loading cargo, the others ship from stockpiles greater than 2000 tons. The refineries are working at low capacity for the duration of the strike.

A meeting of strikers took place on March 10th at a local stadium. They decided to send delegations to the cities and towns of the Republic to clarify their positions and organize pickets at the railyards which transport their ore. The Belorussian Independent Miners Trade Union sent a cable to the Executive Council of Interstate Independent Miners Trade Union on March 19, asking for financial and moral support. At the government's suggestion a delegation of miners went to Minsk on March 20 to resume talks.

The administration of the Association and the chemical workers trade union stated that the strike had become unpredictable. Ivan Yurgevick of the Belorussian Independent Miners Union called this statement a betrayal of the interests of the members that they ought to defend. He indicated that the situation is fully under control — under the control of the leaders of the union and the strike committees of the mines.

Local miners union bodies from Vorkuta and Inta in Russia sent the striking miners 90,000 rubles.

At the moment a commission is working on the temporary agreement between the miners and the government, on the basis of which the pay of miners would be raised by steps. The commission is headed up by the vice-chairman of the state committee of industry.

PREDICTIONS ARE GRIM

MINSK The Independent Trade Union supported the program of economic development for Belorussia that was presented this week. The program envisions full economic independence of the Republic, introduction of its own currency, and speedy privatization. According to the authors of the program, due to the nonfulfillment of deliveries from other republics of the commonwealth, and due to the general economic recession, the biggest enterprises of Belorussia will stop working toward May, and there will be 700,000 unemployed.

MINSK An Independent Trade Union with 20 members was formed at the transistor plant.

LITHUANIA

"ENJA" IS AGAINST

KAUNAS. The workplace collective of the "Enja" plant staged a warning strike on March 10 demanding a delay in the privatization of the enterprise or the granting to the collective 30% of the privileged shares.

LIMIT ON STRIKES

VILNUS The Parliament of the Republic adopted a law on resolving labor disputes. According to the Workers Union the law fundamentally limits the the right to strike.

HUNGAR STRIKE THREATENED

SHUALYAI A demonstration of workers living in city hostels was held on March 17. Some workers indicated that they were prepared to begin a hungar strike over the abolition of rent subsidies. Now the cost of living in a room of 11 square meters comes to 300 rubles a month. The Workers Union of the city demanded the reconstruction of the hostels into living quarters over five years, the right of workers to buy their flats as private property, and the transfer of the hostels to the local municipalities.

RAILWAY BLOCKED

RADVILISHIKIS The city railwaymen blocked the railway for two hours on March 25. They demanded payment of wages going back three weeks. The city authorities demanded that they clear the blocked line, or else they'd call in the Lithuanian army. The strikers were not threatened. After a train carrying military equipment of the Russian army out of the country was stopped, the authorities tried to make a political scene. They were unsuccessful. The trains began to move only after a written pledge to pay the back salaries before the end of the month.

UNDER PRESSURE

VILNUS The Lithuanian Parliament adopted on March 26 amendment to the Law on Privatization which make it easier for workplace collectives to buy out their enterprises. Deputies took this step under pressure of strikes and pickets at the Parliament building by workers of the city communal services.